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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine whether factors found to be related to student persistence in public and independent two-year colleges (i.e., positive college environment, realistic student expectations for career and education, and a sense of belonging) were generalizable to the proprietary sector. Three proprietary institutions in New York served as research sites: Bryant-Stratton, Buffalo; Utica School of Commerce, Utica; and Monroe Business College, Bronx. Data on student characteristics, the academic environment, goal and commitment factors, and student-college relations were gathered by questionnaires and on-site interviews with over 275 students, faculty, and staff. Study findings including the following: (1) compared with the public/independent college sample, more students in the proprietary schools tended to be female, from families with low incomes, job-oriented, and enrolled due to familiarity with the institution; (2) the primary goal of the proprietary students was to obtain employment and/or go into their own business; (3) when asked why they had persisted when many of their colleagues had not, respondents stressed individual determination and goal commitment; (4) 86.6% of the proprietary students indicated a sense of belonging with respect to their school, with credit generally given to a friendly helpful staff and supportive faculty; and (5) site visits revealed that proprietary schools placed a greater emphasis on creating a positive college environment and sense of belonging than community and independent colleges. Findings regarding persistence influences were validated through a follow-up study of non-persisters and continuing persisters from the public/independent school samples, who were also compared with the proprietary school sample. Where appropriate findings related specifically to minority students are highlighted. The follow-up survey is attached. (JMC)

VERIFYING FACTORS RELATED TO PERSISTENCE WITH AN EMPHASIS ON MINORITY STUDENTS

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Project Report

(VEA 152-91-1873)

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Two-Year College Development Center
University at Albany
State University of New York

in cooperation with

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September 1991

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VERIFYING FACTORS RELATED TO PERSISTENCE WITH AN EMPHASIS ON MINORITY STUDENTS

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This document summarizes the results of the third phase of a project undertaken by the Two-Year College Development Center, University at Albany, State University of New York, in cooperation with the Bureau of Postsecondary Grants Administration, New York State Education Department. The purpose of the study was to validate factors which had been identified in Phase II as important to the persistence of students enrolled in two-year college occupational programs, particularly minority students.

Policy concerns regarding underrepresentation of certain groups in higher education motivate interest in persistence. Ethnicity should, by itself, have no influence on academic success. However, ethnic differences are often associated with disadvantages which are related to academic success. The term "minority" is used in this report as it is commonly understood. While we acknowledge this broad usage may do disservice to a specific ethnic group in a specific situation, it has been used as an inclusive term for reasons of brevity and economy of language. Therefore, we hope our use of minority and related words/ terms will communicate even if there is some perception of inadequacy.

We wish to express our appreciation to the more than 275 students and 30 faculty/staff who willingly cooperated with our data collection. In particular we wish to thank the administrators at three proprietary schools (Bryant-Stratton, Buffalo; Utica School of Commerce; Monroe Business College, Bronx) who arranged and coordinated the data collection and on-site visitations at their respective institutions, and the administrators and faculty at Hudson Valley Community College, Seton School of Iona College and Villa Maria College who coordinated the local collection of questionnaire data from first semester career students. Without the cooperation of administrators, and the willingness of faculty and students at their colleges to share, the study and this document would not have been possible.

Also, we want to acknowledge the support offered by our Advisory Committee throughout the project: Paul Chakonas, Bureau of Postsecondary Grants Administration, New York State Education Department; Ann Felton, Professor of Social Science, Onondaga Community College; Arlene M. Floyd, Director of Admissions, New York City Technical College; Rose A. Furcron-Harris, Professor of Nursing, Nassau Community College; Charles Gotsch, Professor of History, Adirondack Community College; Willie Hammett, Vice President of Student Services, Hudson Valley Community College; Thomas Judd, Director of Institutional Research, Rockland Community College; Patricia Lanier, Professor, Special Educational Services, Bronx Community College; and Geneva Lewis, Associate, Professional Career Opportunities Programs, New York State Education Department.

It is our intention that this document serve as a resource to administrators, faculty and staff in two-year institutions and to educators involved in continued study of persistence and improved academic success of all students.

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FACTORS RELATED TO STUDENT PERSISTENCE WITH EMPHASIS ON MINORITY STUDENTS

A. Introduction and Review of Previous Findings

Two-year colleges, whether public or independent, remain an important avenue for minority and majority students who seek access to higher education and subsequently, upward social and economic mobility. In New York State, the number and scope of legislative and program initiatives designed to increase awareness of and access to educational opportunities for minority students increased significantly during the last decade. For many, the two-year college experience has become the proving ground, a chance to "make something of one's self," opening options for a better life. Since increasing minority access has become an accepted goal of postsecondary educators, emphasis has moved to retention or persistence; access without persistence benefits no one. Examples of this concern as illustrated in current literature include Cage (1989), Chronicle of Higher Education, an article which addressed the growth of more minority programs emphasizing efforts to keep students enrolled in college. In 1989, Richardson wrote "Every rung of the educational ladder must be in place if minority students are to succeed including early intervention, educational planning or preparation, intrusive academic advising and career guidance." In June 1990, the Business Higher Education Forum called for colleges to augment their recruitment and retention efforts for minority youth (CTJC Times).

Data results from this study during Phase II were cast into three factor areas - positive college environment, realistic student expectations for career/education and sense of belongingness. The dependent component, academic success, served as the criterion of a

successful experience resulting in the presentation of the following formula:

POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT	+	REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS	+	BELONGINGNESS	-	ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Approximately 25% of the variance for academic success (GPA) was accounted for from seven variables: average grade in high school, strength of goal, making progress toward achieving the goal, awareness of career context, confidence in passing courses, comfort at the college and sense of belonging at the college and program. The component of positive college environment incorporated, among others, academic support services availability and use, faculty/staff sensitivity to diversity, commitment to equitable treatment of all students, and accessibility of faculty and staff for academic assistance. The component of realistic expectations encompassed awareness of selected programs and careers, realistic goal setting, goal strength, and progress toward goal, among others. The belongingness component was characterized as belonging in the program and at the college, an existence of a positive connection with a person or some part of the institution, a positive comfort level, and a sense of loyalty to the educational program or institution. The formula suggests that academic success culminates from the combination of a positive college environment, realistic expectations by students of career/self, and social-cultural experiences that promote comfort and belonging within the institution. While some differences on selected variables were found to be related to minority status of students, economic and social characteristics had more consistent relationships to academic success and the variable sets than did minority status alone.

Similar findings are found in the research literature regarding retention in higher education. Persistence factors are often broadly categorized into: demographics, including gender, ethnic heritage, age, economic, employment status (Gates & Creamer, 1984); academic factors, including high school GPA, placement, remediation status (Hardin, 1990), and non-cognitive factors including motivation, social integration, self concept, career readiness (Bean & Metzner, 1986; White & Sedlacek, 1986). Several studies have sought a more comprehensive model of student retention (Tinto, 1975; Turnbull, 1986; Webb, 1988; DeVoll, 1989; Brooks-Leonard, 1991). Generally, research indicates that both academic and social integration are important dimensions of student persistence, and that these dimensions can be fostered by faculty and staff who are supportive, understanding and willing to interact with students both in and outside of the classroom. Personal backgrounds and expectations and goal commitments of students are also suggested in the literature as contributors to individual persistence or success. More specific to community-technical colleges, Brooks-Leonard (1991) discussed the lack of studies which examine the meaningful interaction between student demographics and academic factors at the two-year college level, and finds retention literature mostly inconclusive with exceptions such as the lowest rate of consecutive term retention at the two-year college occurs from the first to second semester. Her recent work with first to second term retention identified educational objective, enrollment and employment status, age and first term GPA as significant factors of persistence for two-year college students. In New York State, Halpin (1990) has tested the Tinto model of academic and social integration at a community college with some success.

The remainder of this report describes the final phase of this study with emphasis on generalizability and verification of factors critical to student persistence with a focus on minority students when appropriate.

B. Proprietary Schools

Data Source

To determine the generalizability of factors found to impact student persistence, data were sought from the proprietary sector of postsecondary occupational education.

Three proprietary institutions agreed to serve as research sites: Bryant-Stratton, Buffalo; Utica School of Commerce, Utica; and Monroe Business College, Bronx. The location of the three institutions provided a geographical cross-section of the state as well as a representative sample of minority students in occupational programs. The characteristics of these proprietary institutions differ from traditional public two-year colleges on several aspects. Courses are scheduled on a quarterly system which allows students to complete programs in less than two years due to year-round operation. They are often smaller than community colleges and the common degree offered is an Associate in Occupational Studies (AOS). As a proprietary (private business) institution, its financial structure carries needs and regulations that differ from public institutions. Many proprietary institutions vigorously promote an image of strong individual student support and immediate placement or assurance of an initial employment situation. These differences affect programming, staffing, administration, and policies.

Data were gathered by questionnaires and on-site interviews with students and faculty/staff. The student sample (N = 144) who responded to the questionnaire consisted of significantly more female than male respondents, 8:1. Forty-two students from the three institutions were also interviewed.

Because of limited curricula offered at proprietary schools, almost 75% of responding students were in a business related program (secretarial, word processing, medical secretary, accounting, business administration). The remaining students were enrolled in computer science, travel and tourism. More than 40% (40.9%) were in their first quarter. The distribution of age was 18 through 50, and more than half were of minority status. A summary of characteristics of these respondents follows.

A. Three proprietary institution sites:
   Bryant-Stratton (Buffalo)
   Monroe Business College (Bronx)
   Utica School of Commerce (Utica)

B. Number of questionnaire responses:

Student	144
Faculty	25

C. Number of interviews:

Student	42
Faculty, administrators	17

D. Ethnic background:

43.6%	White, non-Hispanic
25.4%	Black, non-Hispanic
28.9%	Hispanic
.7%	Asian
1.4%	Native American/Indian

(NOTE: Due to rounding, missing data and/or selected averaging, summary data presented in this section may not add to 100% for all factors.)

E. Program enrollment:

44.6% Secretarial/Word Processing, Medical Secretary
27.3% Business and Accounting
15.8% Computer Science
9.4% Travel and Tourism
2.9% Missing data

F. Quarter of enrollment:

40.9% First	4.7% Fourth
27.6% Second	3.9% Fifth
8.7% Third	9.4% Sixth
	4.8% Missing data

Enrollment status: 93.7% full-time; 6.3% part-time

G. Age:

25.2%	18-20	15.4%	35-50
26.6%	21-24	4.8%	> 50
28.0%	25-34		

H. Gender: 12.6% Male 87.4% Female

Significantly more respondents were female 8:1

Personal and Economic Factors

A significantly greater proportion of student respondents from the proprietary sample indicated low family incomes than did the Phase II respondents from public and independent two-year colleges. More than 50% reported an estimated family income of less than $8,000 and less than 25% $15,000 or more. In Phase II, 80% of the original sample reported income levels of more than $15,000. Further, the proprietary sample, as a whole, showed lower income levels than did any one minority group within the previous sample.

Almost 75% of proprietary students reported family homes were rented, compared to 45% in the original Phase II sample, a percentage that compares to the Hispanic population of Phase II. Less than 25% indicated their family home as owned, compared to more than 50% of the original sample who indicated family ownership.

Parental level of education was at less than high school graduation for approximately 50%, as compared to approximately 25% in

the original sample. This suggests that more students in these proprietary institutions are from families with lower levels of education. Both data sources, proprietary and the Phase II institutions, show the existence of strong support for individual students to attend, which similarly, are primarily family and friends. But frequently proprietary students also identified faculty and staff as strong supporters, probably because of the focus on individual student support that was found to be in place at these proprietary institutions.

Summary: Personal and Economic Data

A. Approximate income level of family:

57.3%	< $ 8,000	10.5%	$30,000 - 49,999
17.7%	$ 8,001 - 14,999	.8%	$50,000+
13.7%	$15,000 - 29,999		

B. Family home ownership:

74.6% Rented 23.2% Family-owned 1.4% Other

C. Other family members sharing home:

13.2% Father	31.3% Mother	28.5% Siblings
18.8% Spouse	56.9% Children	9.0% Others

D. Percentage of students who work:

14.7% Yes
85.3% No

E. Parental level of education:

	Mother	Father
Less than high school graduate	45.6%	50.0%
High school graduate	35.3%	26.6%
Some college	8.1%	6.5%
College graduate	5.9%	8.9%
Graduate courses/degree	3.7%	4.8%

F. College living arrangements

14.0% Rent nearby
67.6% Live at home, commute < 45 minutes
16.9% Live at home, commute > 45 minutes

G. Existence of strong supporter(s) of college attendance:

12% No
88% Yes
- 47.6% Family and friends
- 35.2% Family member
- 14.1% Friend(s)
- 3.1% College faculty/staff
- 3.1% Other

Academic Environment

More than a third of the students were not aware or chose not to approximate their current grade point average and more than 30% indicated a GPA of less than 1.5. Although the GPA of the proprietary sample compares unfavorably to the previous sample, their responses were similar on the variable of confidence in passing courses. Regarding support services, more than 80% receive financial aid, almost 45% had heard college representatives prior to enrolling and about 50% had attended an orientation or summer program. Sixty percent (60%) indicated they had taken a number of tests at entry, and 25% received academic advising. Common reasons given for enrolling in the institution included familiarity, a friend or family member had previously attended, and the absence of liberal arts requirements.

One question on the faculty survey asked, "what needs to be done to enhance the chances for success by minority students?" Most respondents stated that there is no focus on minority students per se but rather the intent of the institution is to develop the potential of all students, and to give all students what they need to succeed. Other comments dealt with specific activities at the particular institution such as formalizing follow-up programs, developing academic or support services more fully and promotion of the school's image which in turn helps recruitment and retention.

Another question asked whether individual faculty members were doing anything exceptional that would help retain students, in particular minority students. Thirty-two percent (32%) indicated that faculty and staff are always available to provide assistance and support to students. They also mentioned the existence of networking among

staff that is needed to provide a supportive environment. More than 20% indicated services that are available such as honor listings, counseling, advisement, remedial help, tutoring (including bilingual), plus a general staff sensitivity for specialized help which is made available to any individual student. Activities such as student newspapers, mentoring, Black History events, academic clubs, theme days, and social affairs were also identified. In one instance, a coordinator had responsibility for retention and accompanying services which included a program that allows students to work with faculty on weekends in a tutorial fashion, and is supported by child care services.

Instruments used in placement were identified as ACT, C-PAT and ASSET. When scores do not meet the minimum set by the institution, a frequently used strategy is to offer remediation to upgrade academic skills within a time period often equal to a quarter. If at the end of this period, the student is not able to perform at the desired level, the student is then referred to another agency such as an adult learning center or a BOCES. Programs of remediation are labelled in a number of ways including Foundations and PASS.

Summary: Academic Environment Factors

A. College choice:

57.9%	First choice of college
38.6%	Not first choice

B. Self-reported high school average:

9.9%	90+	3.5%	65-69
51.8%	80-89	7.1%	below 65
27.7%	70-79		

C. Self-reported college grade point average:

25.0%	3.5-4.0	31.4%	<1.5
.2%	2.5-3.4	36.4%	Don't know
6.4%	1.5-2.4		

D. Expressed confidence in passing courses:

42.0%	Very confident	14.7%	Somewhat confident
41.3%	Confident	2.1%	Not very confident

E. Academic support services and activities used by > 40% of responding students:

- 82.6% Received financial aid
- 59.7% Took a number of tests which identified where I needed more work in order to be a success in college
- 54.9% Received help in selection of courses and with the registration process
- 47.1% Enrolled in remedial courses (35.4% math, 18.1% writing, 15.4% study skills, 13.2% reading, 4.2% language)
- 46.5% Attended an orientation or summer program that helped me get ready
- 44.4% Heard college representatives talk about the institution before I enrolled

F. Number of minority faculty/staff contacts reported by students:

28.8%	0	23.7%	3-5	9.4%	10+
30.9%	1-2	7.2%	6-9		

The responses of faculty (N = 25) to other questionnaire items related to the academic environment are subsequently summed.

A. Retention-related activities in place as reported by faculty:

	Regular Ongoing Effort	Periodically Undertaken
Tutoring, mentoring, or other academic support services	96.0%	4.0%
Intrusive academic advising as needed	92.0%	4.0%
Academic assessment and existence of appropriate remedial courses to offset gaps in preparation	80.0%	16.0%
Activities that promote teaching excellence for the good of all students	52.0%	40.0%

B. Characteristics of college environment related to promoting retention as reported by faculty:

92% A generally hospitable environment for minority students

88% A priority given to retention throughout the institution

80% Career counseling and guidance that helps minority students translate goals into educational programs and courses

80% Support for networks among students, faculty, and/or staff

72% A monitoring of completion/attrition of minority students on a semester or annual basis

68% Strong and visible leadership supporting retention efforts

48% An awareness of minority student representation in terms of the minority representation within the community served

44% Financial aid programs tailored for minority students

C. Extent of faculty agreement with this statement:

On this campus the gap is minimal between policy statements and actual practice as related to the institution-wide level of support for improving retention of minority students.

16% Strongly agree 64% Agree -- Disagree
4% Strongly disagree 8% Not sure

Reason for agreement/disagreement:

Emphasis on retention is for all students, support and follow-up provided for all students

Goal and Commitment Factors

The primary goal of responding proprietary students was to obtain employment and/or go into their own business (>70%). About a quarter of the students indicated an intent to eventually continue their education. The strength and achievement of goal appears positive and, for most students, the college experience had not changed their intentions but had fine-tuned their original goal for enrolling in their programs.

More non-minority students expressed interest in advanced degrees than minority students, although the difference was not significant.

Hispanic students tended to show more variance in goal strength and more concern for academic progress than other ethnic groups.

When students were asked in interviews why they had continued while some of their colleagues had not, the primary reasons given dealt with individual determination and goal commitment. Also, most students felt that many peers who had dropped out, had done so because of personal problems or situations that could not be solved by any other action. Further, they felt that those who continued were fortunate enough to have the support of family or friends.

Perceived advantages of attending a proprietary institution were discussed in terms of the investment of time needed to complete a degree, the anticipated placement support, the size (small) of the institution and classes and the job-related training offered. As to disadvantages, some students felt they lacked some awareness about the career field for which they were preparing, others noted the difficulty of changing programs, and increased costs. A few students felt there was a need for upgrading of courses and instruction, others found the content too concentrated in the quarter system and would have appreciated instruction spread over a longer time period.

Summary: Goal and Commitment Factors

A. Reason for college entry:

45.1%	Complete associate degree and get a good job
25.7%	To get some training for a job
22.2%	Complete associate degree and transfer
2.8%	To try college to see if I like it
2.8%	To start college and transfer
1.4%	I was pressured to enroll

B. Strength of commitment to goal:

53.6%	I have to achieve it in order to be happy
23.6%	I'd like to achieve that goal but it's only a point along the way
12.1%	I'm open for change; if something better comes along I'll take it

10.0% I don't know

C. Extent of achieving goal:
- 30.6% On target
- 49.3% Working toward it
- 16.7% Hoping I can make it
- 3.5% Unhappy about progress

D. Immediate interest after completing/leaving program
- 26.6% Seek bachelor's degree
- 60.8% Get a job
- 12.6% Other

E. Highest college degree hoped to achieve
- 42.9% Associate degree
- 35.9% Bachelor's degree
- 14.1% Graduate degree
- 2.1% No degree expected

F. Career awareness for which currently studying:
- 17.5% Very knowledgeable
- 45.8% Somewhat knowledgeable
- 31.3% Knowledgeable
- 5.6% Not very knowledgeable

Belongingness Factors

An overwhelming majority (86.6%) of responding students indicated a sense of belonging to the respective proprietary institution and program, with credit usually given to friendly, helpful staff and supportive faculty. Almost 90% also reported a positive "comfort" level. A sense of loyalty or allegiance to the institution was discussed by some in terms of appreciating individual help received with loyalty being more to individual faculty members. Others indicated they were there because of the program and allegiance to the institution was still open to question.

The majority of interviewed students found the experience at the institution to be positive. Most students indicated they had friends both in and outside the institution. At one institution in particular, many students responded that they had more friends at school, which was also the same institution that strongly promoted a family-like atmosphere.

A few students reported that they had found favoritism shown to the more capable students, but no instances of differential treatment were reported relative to race or gender except an occasional person with an "attitude problem."

Faculty were asked if they were aware of tension based on gender or ethnic groups, and 24% responded affirmatively. Explanations centered on interactions among different minority groups were not always tension-free, but that generally, students tended to "get along."

Summary: Belongingness Factors

A. Sense of difference in treatment from other students:
   93.7% No 2.8% Yes 3.5% Somewhat

B. Comfort level at college:
   37.8% Very comfortable 15.4% Somewhat comfortable
   45.5% Comfortable 1.4% Not very comfortable

C. Sense of belonging at college/program
   86.6% Yes 10.6% Somewhat 2.8% No

D. Recommend institution to others:
   77.1% Yes 17.9% Depends 2.9% No

E. Anticipated sense of allegiance/loyalty to institution once leaving:
   47.9% Definitely 13.4% Hard to say
   31.0% Maybe 2.8% No

F. Most frequently identified single greatest advantage offered by institution to facilitate success (listed by frequency):
   Job placement opportunity
   Personal attention/support
   Faculty/staff
   Time needed for degree
   Class size
   Program

Summary

Compared with the Phase II sample, more students in the proprietary schools tended to be female, come from families with low incomes, be job-oriented, and enrolled due to familiarity with the institution. Few differences among ethnic groups were found. Finances

were a concern to many students. Both students and staff concur that the institutions provide a great deal of academic support for each student during their attendance. There was a concerted effort by these institutions to encourage a sense of approachability to faculty/staff, to provide opportunities for some social activities, to recognize achievement and to publicly reinforce the importance of student success to their family members. Tutoring, remedial support, and counseling are provided in a systematic and planned manner. All staff, including secretaries, receptionists, faculty and administrators are geared toward promoting a sense of collegiality and family. Most students are aware of this effort although it was more pervasive in some institutions and programs than others.

The expectations held by students were geared to employment, and generally sense that "what they are there for is what they are going to get." As a result of their experience at the proprietary institution, students believe they will be able to achieve their goals that they have set for themselves.

Interview data from these proprietary institutions generally support the persistence/success formula presented in Phase II of this project (positive college environment + realistic expectations + belongingness = academic success). The site visits lead to a finding that proprietary institutions, more than community and independent colleges, place heavy emphases on a positive college environment and a sense of belonging and feeling wanted. The success of proprietary schools may be partially explained by the priority given to emphasizing total institutional support for their students.

C. Student Follow-up Results

In addition to proprietary students, two other comparative groups of students, non-persisters and continuing persisters, were sought as data sources to validate the tentative findings of Phase II of this project.

Agreements were secured from four colleges to administer the student questionnaire (used in Phase II) to first-year students early in the fall of 1990, and then indicate during second semester which of these students were still enrolled. The identification would be accomplished through coded questionnaires and managed locally by staff at each college. The intent of this procedure was to produce data on first year students who did not continue into the second semester providing an opportunity to compare responses between persisters and non-persisters. Due to a series of circumstances at the campuses, this plan resulted in the identification of only 44 first-semester respondents from three colleges. Of these, 37 continued enrollment during the second semester, and 1 transferred leaving only 6 cases of non-persisters, a number far too small for meaningful analysis.

The second comparison group sought as a source of data was termed as continuing persisters. This group consisted of students from Phase II who agreed (via a questionnaire item) to respond to a follow-up survey one year later. Of the 189 who provided a deliverable address, 40% (N = 75) responded to the follow-up form (Attachment A). A brief profile of the follow-up respondents as a group indicates that 66.7% are 24 years of age or younger, 74.3% are female, 88.6% are enrolled full-time and 33.1% are of minority status.

One question asked in the follow-up was, "What is your current college status?" The responses are subsequently summed:

Total Respondents	Minority	Non-minority
12.2% completed my program or graduated	8.1%	4.1%
68.9% enrolled in classes to complete program/graduate	23.1%	45.8%
4.1% enrolled in classes but changed program	1.4%	2.7%
9.5% enrolled in different college	6.8%	2.7%
5.4% not enrolled in college classes	--	5.4%

Less than 6% are no longer enrolled or continuing their education, all non-minority. Individuals no longer enrolled identified their current status as employed, as attending to family responsibilities, or as reconsidering options.

Continuing students were asked to identify the two factors most important to continuance of their college education by first and second priority. The identified items are subsequently presented.

Critical Factor	Identified as First Priority	Identified as Second Priority
1. Personal desire to succeed	61.7%	20.8%
2. Support from person outside college	28.3%	54.7%
3. College faculty/staff	8.3%	18.9%
4. College office, department, support service	1.7%	5.6%

Personal desire to succeed was the first priority for a majority of the respondents. Support from a person outside the college was identified as second most frequent first priority factor and the most

frequent second priority factor. College faculty, staff, office or other college based factors combine to account for 10% of the first priority and 24.5% of the second priority factors. These responses lead to an observation that college staff and services can make an important contribution to persistence for all students but can be the critical factors in persistence for about one-third of the students.

Continuing students were also asked to identify obstacles to remaining in college. Job, family responsibilities, and location of college outside minority concentrations were identified most often. The lack of intervention programs, minority faculty/administrative staff, cultural/social activities, plus cost and an unsupportive surrounding community were also noted as obstacles by only a few students.

D. Summary of Comparison Analyses

Hypothetically these students, continuing persisters, should exhibit selected persistence-related characteristics that were of equal or greater strength than those of the Phase II sample and thus provide evidence regarding generalizability of the success formula previously derived.

The analysis techniques used in Phase II were applied to the two groups, proprietary students and continuing persisters. Using multiple regression with GPA as a dependent variable, less variance was accounted for within the proprietary student sample than the persister sample. Since an examination of means of characteristics demonstrated that the proprietary school respondents were somewhat older and had lower family income levels than public/independent respondents, these variables were added to the regression formula. This resulted in increasing the variance accounted for to approximately .21 for the total group and

minority students as a subgroup, but .45 for non-minority students. Minority students were younger and had significantly lower family incomes than the non-minority segment of proprietary respondents.

While there were some differences between means of individual variables for minority and non-minority proprietary students, the variables of loyalty to the institution, and willingness to recommend the institution to other students had significantly higher inter-correlations with feelings of belonging to the institution among non-minority students (.52, .49) than among minority students (.27, .28). The intercorrelations between awareness of career program and confidence in passing courses (.55) was greater for minority than non-minority students (.31).

For the continuing persister group, the variance accounted for within the total group using GPA as the dependent variable was .32, .37 for non-minority students, .59 for minority students. These respondents were younger and had higher average family incomes than the proprietary sample. Further analyses found that minority students in the persister group more closely resembled non-minority students of the proprietary sample than their non-minority counterparts in the persister group. Intercorrelations of the variables loyalty, comfort, belonging and recommending the institution to others were stronger for minority persisters and proprietary non-minority students. The regression formula was more successful in explaining variance in GPA for these two subgroups (.45 and .59) than for either total group (.21 and .31) or the larger Phase II respondent group (.25).

Results of the analyses tend to support the notion that for the continuing persister group, the success formula would explain an

increased amount of the variance in GPA. This was especially true for minority students within the persister group. Data also strengthened the findings that variables such as feeling comfortable on the campus, belonging, loyalty and recommending the program/college to others, are more important for minority students than non-minority students.

The questionnaire data from the proprietary school sample leads to an observation that students with somewhat different attitudes attend proprietary schools than public or independent two-year colleges. The success formula was a better fit for non-minority students, explaining significantly greater variance in GPA than for minority students. Also these proprietary students were significantly less wealthy and somewhat older than the Phase II sample; age and family income became more active components of the analysis.

Data from on-site interviews lead to somewhat different conclusions. Proprietary school staff appear to be very focused on supporting student achievement and promoting comfort, loyalty and belonging. Student attitudes supported this image of the proprietary school and why it is successful in spite of being more expensive and often perceived as not really a college. Interview data lead to a conclusion that the success formula, with greater weighting on the positive environment and belongingness variables, is appropriate for proprietary schools but questionnaire data would limit such a finding to non-minority students only.

E. Summary Observations

The emphasis of the final phase of this study of persistence was on generalizability and verification of factors critical to persistence of students, minority and non-minority in two-year college career

programs. Previously, results suggested that three categories of factors (positive college environment, realistic student expectations and sense of belonging) contributed to academic success. A source of support, usually family, a strong desire to rise above current economic level, a hospitable, comfortable and accepting environment staffed by caring faculty, and an academic or social sense of belonging at the college significantly enhanced the chance for academic success.

These findings were generally confirmed by follow-up data obtained from continuing students. A majority identified a personal desire to succeed and the support of an individual outside the college as critical factors to their continuance in college. Data from the proprietary sites partially reinforced previous findings. The strong, comprehensive emphases on a positive college environment and the promoting of belonging and feeling wanted may be more important at proprietary schools than at public and independent colleges, particularly for non-minority students.

Phase II data indicated few significant differences between minority and non-minority populations relative to persistence variables. Current results generally mirror the previous findings for total student groups although differences between minority and non-minority students were found in the interrelationships of individual variables such as institutional loyalty, sense of belonging, comfort, career awareness, and goal achievement. Demographically, proprietary students as a group were older and came from families with lower economic incomes than the persisters at public/independent sites. As noted, responses from persister minority respondents tended to resemble non-minority

proprietary respondents more than their non-minority persister counterparts.

By way of generalization, the findings of the current phase reinforce an earlier observation that students are students, many with similar needs and varying states of preparedness for a collegiate experience and that persistence is often more related to an individual's economic and educational disadvantages than ethnicity or locality.

Although the factors within the success/persistence formula have been reinforced by current data results, comparisons between persisters and non-persisters were not achieved. Characteristics or factors that may have contributed to persistence but differed from those already identified remain a direction for future research to pursue, particularly during those critical initial weeks of college enrollment. With that exception, this study has, based on data results, derived a success/persistence formula that has demonstrated the importance of a positive college environment in helping students to achieve individual, realistic expectations while functioning in an integrated but culturally diverse society. Interview discussions suggest that the comfortable, supportive environment may be more important for those with greater economic disadvantages. While it may be easier at small institutions to develop this supportive environment, these factors can be improved at all colleges since many of the changes come from the attitudes of administration, faculty and staff and do not require significant budget adjustments.

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ATTACHMENT A

FOLLOW-UP SURVEY

(VEA 152-91-1873)

Dear Student,

You may remember answering a questionnaire about your college experiences last year. As part of that survey, we asked if you would be willing to respond to a follow-up about your college and job-related activities. You did provide us with information so that we could contact you at this time.

Would you complete this form and return it in the stamped self-addressed envelope by February 20, 1991. As before, all information will remain anonymous. Thank you for your help.

Two-Year College Development Center
University at Albany
(518/442-5590)

Name: _____

College: _____

1) What is your current college status? *(Check one only.)*

_____Completed my program and/or graduated. (Respond to #2; skip to #6, 7, 8.)
_____Enrolled in classes to complete my program and/or graduate. (Skip to #6, 7, 8.)
_____Enrolled in classes but changed my program. (Respond to #4, 6, 7, 8.)
_____Not enrolled in college classes. (Respond to #2, 3, 6, 7, 8.)
_____Enrolled in a different college. (Skip to #5, 6, 7, 8.)

2) If you are not enrolled as a student, what is your current status?

_____Employed.
_____Not employed, seeking a job.
_____Undecided.
_____Other; specify: _____

3) Why did you decide to leave college at this time? _____

_____

4) If you have changed your college program within the past year, please identify your new program and explain reason for change: _____

_____

_____

5) If you have changed colleges within the past year, please identify your new college, your program and explain the reason for the change: _____

_____

_____

6) What two factors or persons are/were most important to your continuing as a college student? Put #1 for the most important factor, #2, the next most important.

_____A college faculty/staff member.
Please identify position such as professor, advisor, counselor, etc.: _____

_____A college office, department or support service.
Please identify such as learning center, financial aids, tutoring, etc.: _____

_____Support from a person outside the college.
Please identify such as father, mother, spouse, friends, etc.: _____

_____My personal desire to succeed.
Please explain: _____

_____

_____Other, please describe: _____

_____

7) What recommendations would you make to your college that would help more students like yourself succeed in college? _____

_____

_____

8) Other comments: _____

_____

_____

Thank you for helping us.

Please return on or before February 20, 1991 to:

Two-Year College Development Center
University at Albany
135 Western Avenue, Husted 208
Albany, New York 12222

ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges
DEC 06 1991